

SAN JUAN ISLANDS



CONSERVATION
DISTRICT
SAN JUAN COUNTY, WASHINGTON

San Juan Islands Conservation District
530 Guard Street, Friday Harbor, WA 98250
www.sanjuanislandscd.org
360-378-6621

**San Juan County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Work Group Meeting
Minutes**

Wednesday, September 15 2021, 10:30-12 p.m.
Zoom Attendance

Attendees: Paul Andersson (SJICD), Vicki Heater (SJICD/Board), Brook Brouwer (WSU), Matt Claussen (SJICD), Charlie Behnke (SJC-Land Bank), Byron Rot (SJC), Cathi Winings (SJICD), Kendra Smith (SJC)

Minutes

The Work Group welcomes our newest member, Charlie Behnke, from the San Juan County Land Bank. Paul provided a brief overview of the VSP and history to help introduce Charlie to the program.

Work Group membership

- There is a need for new membership and representation of agricultural operators.
- We have a new contact with Ryan Miller from Tulalip Tribes. Paul will followup with him on his level of interest.
- Members are supposed to be appointed by County Council; some regular meeting attendees are not officially members. We hope to appoint new members at an upcoming Council meeting.
- Friends of the San Juans continues to provide comment on VSP, but is not interested in Work Group membership. We continue to invite them to the table.
- It was suggested that we develop a process for removing members who don't participate from the Work Group, perhaps after missing two meetings. *This item needs more discussion.*
- Current members are encouraged to talk to other farmers to join.
- Byron will send Samish tribal contact.

Biennial Report

- The biennial report was submitted to WSCC at the end of August
- Paul provided an overview of the difference between this report and 5-year report. This report has a focus more on long-term agricultural viability, and less on protection and enhancement goal achievement.

- Reconciling data is a current huge task. We are working to develop database to better track progress. Data will also be tied to GIS so we can produce maps for visualization.
- Working on communications plan to start collecting the baseline data from 2011.
- Kelsey Kittleson will be working on database and outreach project.

There are two topics to keep on the Work Group radar

These two topics haven't been directly addressed in any recent reports and we should decide how and where to address them:

1. The CARA groundwater resources goal. (*Additional information provided here that wasn't discussed in the meeting, for everyone's information*). Here is the goal from the work plan:

Protect groundwater resources that support agricultural activities and balance competing needs for water while preserving natural hydrologic functions and their related ecological processes (e.g., water quality, and water quantity)

Performance metric: Quantify amount of water needed to support agricultural use, to the extent possible to protect this right, while providing sufficient water for natural hydrologic cycles.

Here is how we said we would address it in the Adaptive Management Plan:

This is a complex goal that addresses the important need of quantifying agricultural use of groundwater; however, we have been unable to access the tools necessary to accurately estimate this use. We will continue to encourage actions such as well meter installations and staff gauges to quantify use and will reevaluate how to use that data as more of it becomes available. Given that this goal also directs us to balance competing needs for water, we will address it further under agricultural viability.

- Clarification: a question was asked if this goal includes surface water. Based on the goal language, it only addresses groundwater, however, the metric seems to imply that ground and surface water would be quantified.
- USGS has been contracted to do a new study for water balance, which may help to inform some of these questions

2. Climate change goals from Work Plan.

- This is another area where the Work Group identified goals for climate change, but there hasn't been an obvious report in which to address these goals.
- It was acknowledged that these goals were self-imposed by the Work Group, i.e., there were no requirements to have climate-related goals.
- Where should we address them and do they need adaptive management? It was suggested that we develop better metrics, such as: whether wells are going dry, drought conditions, and are more ponds being built. Perhaps it can be addressed in a future biennial report.
- Data collection could occur in next ag viability report, during ISP monitoring, or other outreach.

Ag Viability Report

The recent survey is completed and released; Faith has presented several times. Findings were used to inform Biennial Report.

Adaptive Management Plan

The State Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting was on September 9 to provide a status update on AMP implementation. Next status meeting is in November. Final decision on whether we remain or fail out of VSP is in December.

There was a SAC request to add “voluntary/encouragement” language to all the enhancement goals, so it is clear that enhancement goals are voluntary. We will followup with WSCC on how to address this.

Other Updates

- With new county contract, need to produce eight ISPs for the next two years. Over \$330,000 has been issued for cost share projects over last five years.
- The Clean Water Utility collects water quality data on False Bay Creek. This year UW is collecting. Byron will get UW contact for Cathi to communicate more on FB data collection efforts and how to use to inform the water quality benchmark.
- Discussion about concerns over new ag and critical areas permitting
 - With VSP adoption, the local regulatory authority for dealing with violations on ag land through San Juan County is now different with VSP, but the state and federal regulatory backdrops remain in place. The County still has authority to reference violations to state and feds if they so choose.
 - Two recent examples of new startup ag producers performing land conversion to ag that have harmed critical areas were provided. The county made the decision that tree removal and pond building were ag activities, so no action was taken. There are still permitting requirements for DNR and Ecology for these areas of development
 - Pond development is governed through permitting process thru DOE. Are there blind spots that the County needs to be aware of as part of the process?
 - Although the regulatory backstop with state agencies should be used for these instances, they often respond saying the issue is too small to address. Is there a more effective way for the county to work with these agencies?
 - How can we work better together to achieve the common goal of critical areas protection? Suggestions include:
 - County develop stronger relationships with regulatory backstop agencies
 - County and CD improve methods to learn about and reach out to those behind violations
 - CD improve outreach to proactively recruit new ag producers into ISP development
 - Dilemma-when is violation occurring? What is the process that the County has in place in lieu of VSP effects upon CAO, to address violations? A draft flowchart of process in regards to the VSP has been drafted by CD.
 - Because the County is a complaint-driven system, the damage is already done. Is there a statute of limitations?
 - More to discuss with council and new DCD director. Kendra will discuss more with Paul.

Action Items

- Byron send contacts for UW water quality study, Samish contact

- Further discuss process for membership removal for unresponsive members
- Decide where to address groundwater resource CARA goal and climate change goals, and do we need to adaptively manage climate change goals and benchmarks?
- Followup on SAC request for language changes to our enhancement goals
- Develop game plan for how to address new ag and critical areas protection, including more discussion on pond issues